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SUBCOMMITTEE ON SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND SPACE OF THE COMMITTEE ON
COMMERCE, SCIENCE AND TRANSPORTATION
OCTOBER 21, 1999

I'm pleased to offer my statement before the Science, Technology and Space Subcommittee today and thank Chairman Frist and the Committee for allowing this discussion on such an important topic. The final outcome of this subject is a critical one for the scientific, research, librarian and other communities who value the services National Technical Information Service (NTIS) provides and also for the over 260 dedicated employees that work for NTIS.

NTIS serves a crucial need as a federal clearinghouse to collect and disseminate scientific, technical and engineering information, most of which has been funded in whole or in part by the federal government. But recently, questions about financial health of NTIS has resulted in a hasty decision to close NTIS before all the facts have been considered. This hearing gives us the opportunity to fully assesses NTIS' mission and how well that mission has been fulfilled.

I believe the current plans for NTIS' closure are premature. As I understand, the NTIS would close, shift its functions to the Library of Congress and somehow ensure that all federal agencies publish their technical and business reports on the Internet without fully examining if the Library of Congress is the best place to transfer NTIS' archives and databases and exactly how such a move would transpire.

While I appreciate the Secretary's efforts to inform me and others of the closure, I remain concerned that the Department of Commerce announced -- rather than consulted with -- the employees, about the urgent need to close. The Department didn't even consult with the Library of Congress, who would have the considerable responsibility to execute the core mission functions of NTIS.

Only when it is shown that NTIS cannot fulfill its core mission is it appropriate to discuss alternatives to replicate what NTIS has done. And those plans should be undertaken in a methodical and thoughtful way. As it stands now, the announcement of NTIS' closure could harm those individuals and organizations who depend on NTIS' services and products, and most certainly has caused anxiety among the fine employees working at NTIS.

Finally, I appreciate the opportunity to make my statement on this matter and I'm heartened that there will now be an opportunity to better examine the Department of Commerce's plans. I'd again like to thank the Chairman and the committee for holding this hearing today. I hope this will be the first step the Committee takes to evaluate the situation now facing NTIS and answer these very important questions before committing to only one plan of action.